

Distance Learning at the Cleveland Museum of Art
Ancient American Art: The Aztecs and Their Ancestors
Grades 7 - 12

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Teacher note:

Please have students bring pencils and worksheets to the videoconference.

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Teacher Information Guide

Program Objectives:

1. Through artifacts in the CMA's collection, students will be introduced to aspects of the daily life and rituals of Mesoamerican cultures.
2. Students will learn about the various materials and technical innovations used to make objects.
3. Students will learn how these objects and artifacts are interpreted.

National Education Standards:

For Fine Arts - Visual Arts (grades 5-8, 9-12):

- Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
- Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines.
- Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas

For Language Arts - English (grades K-12):

- Evaluation Strategies
- Communication Strategies
- Applying Knowledge
- Multicultural Understanding
- Applying Non-English Perspectives

For Language Arts – Foreign Languages (grades K-12):

- Communication
- Cultures
- Connections
- Comparisons
- Communities

For Social Sciences - Geography (grades K-12):

- The World in Spatial Terms
- Places and Regions

- Human Systems
- Environment and Society

For Social Sciences – World History (grades 5-12):

- Era 2: Early Civilizations and the Emergence of Pastoral Peoples, 4000-1000 BCE
- Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires 1000 BCE-300 CE
- Era 4: Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter, 300-1000 CE
- Era 5: Intensified Hemispheric Interactions, 1000-1500 CE

Prior to the Lesson:

Make photocopies of the enclosed worksheet for each student and bring to your distance learning site. Students will be partially completing these sheets during the program.

Suggested Activities Prior to or Following the Program:

1. Divide students into groups and give each group one of the enclosed color images from the distance learning lesson (or found on the website). Students can develop and research a topic related to each image, such as: *Daily Life (Male and Female Figures)*; *Warriors and Weapons* or *Aztecs vs. Cortés (Warrior Figure)*; *Gods and Rulers (Stela relief)*; *Animals of the Americas (Stela)*. Oral reports could be made to the class, or presentations could be created with computer software such as Hyper Studio or Power Point. **Option:** Research groups could devise a simple five question quiz to give to the class after their report based on the material they present. This can serve as a check for comprehension or an evaluation tool.
2. Study the Spanish Conquest. **Consider:** What happened? When? How did life change for the Aztecs? How did their art forms and styles change? Did the Aztecs and Spaniards place the same value on objects for their function or as works of art? You may find the web site useful - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_conquest_of_the_Aztec_Empire.

Selected Vocabulary:

Archeology – The study of ancient sites and artifacts.

Aztec – Ancient American people who ruled a large empire in (what is now) Central Mexico from 14th-16th centuries, before its conquest by the Spaniards in 1521. Many of the ethnic groups of Aztec people spoke the Nahuatl language.

Glyph – A symbol used to represent a name, word or message.

Maya – Ancient American people of Central America whose highly developed civilization originated during the Pre-Classic period (c. 2000 BC – 250 AD) and reached its height during the

Classic period (c. 250 - 900 AD). Some of their cities continued through the Post Classic period until the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century.

Mesoamerica – The regions now called South America, Mexico and New Mexico.

Olmec – Ancient American people who are believed to be earliest inhabitants of Mesoamerica. They lived along the Gulf coast (in the areas today known as Veracruz and Tabasco.) Their civilization existed during the Pre-Classic period from approximately 1500 – 400 BC.

Pre-Columbian - belonging to, or representing the period of time before the arrival of Columbus in America.

Quetzal – A Central American bird with brilliant golden-green and red feathers.

Stela (stelae, pl.) – A free-standing stone slab, carved on one or more faces.

Teaching Extensions:

Visual Arts

1. Experience Ancient American sculpture techniques: Each student should have a bar of soap or a large potato. First, students should sketch a simple design of a plant or animal on paper (for ideas refer to the enclosed images or consult the Cleveland Museum of Art website: <http://www.clevelandart.org/art/departments.aspx> (Select *Art of the Americas*). Tell the students they will carve the soap or potato into these designs, in three-dimensional form. Then send the students outside to find “tools” in nature, as the Ancient Americans did, to carve, incise, and polish their images (i.e. sticks, stones, etc.). When the images are complete discuss the process and problems of using tools from nature to create images and then how today’s modern technologies have changed this process.

Materials needed: paper, pencils, bars of soap or potatoes for carving, reeds, rocks, sticks (students can collect these)

2. Explore derivations between realism and abstraction: Have students study and then draw the shapes on the *Stela Relief* (no. 1967.29) to try to identify them, and then discuss how these shapes are different from the appearance of these objects in nature.

Materials needed: paper, pencils, crayons, or colored pencils

3. Urban planning: Have students graph the plans of their city, neighborhood, even their school campus, mapping out the important areas for events, administration, celebration, etc. What shape do the confines of these spaces create? How does the placement of each important area relate to the function of the area near it? How do people move from one place to another? Compare these plans and their construction to Teotihuacán.

Materials needed: paper or graph paper, straight-edge, pen/pencil

Language Arts

1. Discuss the fact that objects created for common or function-specific purposes by the Ancient Americans are now exhibited in museums and considered artifacts that provide

information about the lifestyles of these people. Next, think about what kinds of common objects we use that people living 1000 years from now might rely on to learn about 21st century life in the United States and consider worthy of exhibition in a museum. Have students pair up and make a museum label for an object used today that might appear in a museum in 1000 years – information might include: title, date, material, function, technological and historical considerations.

Materials needed: pen/pencil and paper

2. After completing the urban planning project, students could write a narrative from the point of view of a 31st century explorer who discovers their city or campus. Narratives could include items discussed in the activity above.

Materials needed: pen/pencil and paper

For Upper Elementary Grades

3. Throughout history, people have tried to find a way to record their thoughts, stories, histories and important numbers. In many places in the world different cultures have devised a code or alphabet in order to write these things down. As an individual or group project, have the students research the origins of writing throughout the world. Include the following: who the people were, where they were living, the approximate dates of their civilization, how their writing codes looked, etc. Before they begin their project, you may want to show the students a few examples of writing systems such as Egyptian hieroglyphs, Maya emblem glyphs (enclosed), or cuneiform. The following are books you may want to consult on writing:

Clairborne, Robert. *The Birth of Writing*. New York: Time-life Books, 1974.

Roaf, Michael. *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East*. New York: Facts on File, 1990.

Viola, Herman J. and Margolis, Carolyn. *Seeds of Change*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991.

Walker, C. B. *Reading the Past: Cuneiform*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.

Materials needed: pen/pencil and paper

Suggested Reading:

For students...

Baquedano, Elizabeth. *Eyewitness Books: Aztec, Inca and Maya*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1993.

Defrates, Joanna. *What do we Know about the Aztecs?* New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1992.

Hicks, Peter. *The Aztecs*. New York: Thomson Learning, 1993. (Grades 4-7)

Janson, Thor. *In the Land of Green Lightning: The World of the Maya*. San Francisco, CA: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1994.

Odiik, Pamela. *The Aztecs*. South Melbourne, Australia: McMillan, 1989. (Grades 4-8)
The Mayas. South Melbourne, Australia: McMillan, 1989. (Grades 4-8)
Shepherd, Donna Walsh. *The Maya*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1992. (Grades 3-7)
Steele, Philip. *The Aztec News: The Greatest Newspaper in Civilization*. Cambridge: Candlewick Press, 1997.
Wood, Tim. *The Aztecs (See-Through History)*. New York: Viking Books, 1992.

For teachers...

Coe, Michael, Dean Snow and Elizabeth Benson. *Atlas of Ancient America*. New York: Facts on File, 1986. (Adult text, maps and photos for all ages)

Websites of Interest:

- *Maya Adventure*: highlights science activities and information related to ancient and modern Maya culture. www.sci.mus.mn.us/sln/ma/top.html
- *Mayan Kids*: interactive website with information on Mayan people, places, beliefs, and games to play online. <http://www.mayankids.com/index.html>
- *Adding Mayan Numbers*, internet math activity suitable for grades 4 and up
<http://mathcentral.uregina.ca/RR/database/RR.09.00/hubbard1/>
- *The Aztec Empire*: a Library Thinkquest website designed by students
<http://library.thinkquest.org/16325/y-main.html>
- *The Aztec Calendar*: displays today's date according to Aztec graphics and calculations
<http://www.azteccalendar.com/azteccalendar.html>

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Student Worksheet

A. Timeline: Fill in the names of the civilizations discussed in the appropriate place on the timeline.

BC 2000	1500	1000	500	0	500	1000	1500	2000 AD
<div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">1.</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">2.</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">3.</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 10px;">4.</div>								

B. Main Ideas:

1. Write brief descriptions of the following items for each civilization:

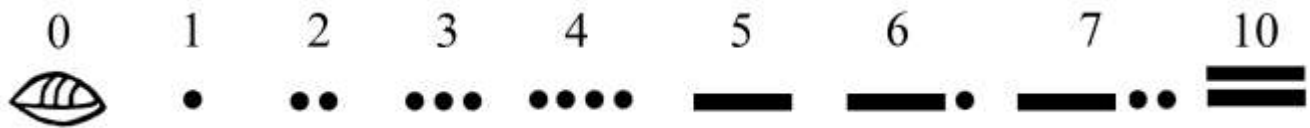
Civilizations	Clothes	Food	Work	Worship	Inventions
Olmec					
Maya					
Teotihuacán					
Aztec					

2. **Fill-in-the-Blank:** The term _____ describes all the various peoples who lived in the regions now called South America, Mexico and New Mexico. At different times they created inventions which we still use today, such as a calendar system, irrigation, and ceramic techniques. Sometimes they are also referred to as Ancient Americans.
3. List the types of materials from which Ancient American objects are made:
4. What is the most important message interpreted from the large Maya stele?

C. Brainstorming: Write down any ideas you might have about the following questions:

1. What happened to the face of *Na Kan Ajaw* (pronounced “nah con ah-how”) on the large Maya Stele?
2. City Planning: What kinds of activities are you and your family engaged in every week? Consider where you live, chores, errands, and things you do for fun. What buildings and public spaces in your city are necessary for you to fulfill these activities?

D. Write your age using hieroglyphs:



E. Write down one new interesting fact that you learned today:

Writing About Art

Learning to write about art is a helpful tool in understanding it. Once the observer knows what to look for in a piece of artwork, it becomes easier to both write about and understand the work. Listed below is a guideline that will help you.

Questions to ask yourself as you write:

1. *What do you see? What is this picture about?*
People
Objects
Scene – time and place
Action – what is going on?
2. *How is the work made -- what materials, tools, or processes are used? What elements has the artist manipulated? The following list may be helpful.*
Oil, watercolor, pastel, ink, clay
Palette knife, brush, pen, chalk, etching, screen printing
Color, light, line, shape, space
3. *How does the work make you feel?*
Happy, sad, anxious, angry, nostalgic, adventurous
Are the brushstrokes rough or smooth, or are they evident at all? Are the colors hot or cool?
Is the subject matter active or quiet? Are the lines flowing, irregular or discontinuous?

In addition to analyzing the work, it is also important to do a little research about the artist such as when and where the artist lived. What were some of the things the artist was concerned about and how is this apparent in his or her work? Were there things in the artist's life that inspired him or her? In short:

4. *What can you learn about the artist?*
What country is the artist from?
What can you find out about his or her experiences?
What ideas or feelings is the artist suggesting?

Finally, play the role of the art critic. Art criticism is based on a number of things. Think, for example, about the style the artist is using. You may want to consider the following approaches the artist may have taken:

Realism: The artist accurately describes the subject matter – the art looks real.

Formalism: The artist has experimented with shape, color, space in an unusual way.

Now put it all together! You decide - has the artist succeeded in doing what you think he or she tried to do?

**Images from Ancient American Art:
The Aztecs and Their Ancestors**
The Cleveland Museum of Art

Selected Images



Male and Female Figures,
Mexico, Nayarit, c. 100 BCE—500 CE, 1998.83
©The Cleveland Museum of Art



Warrior Figure,
Mexico, Aztec, c. 1350-1519, 1984.37
©The Cleveland Museum of Art

**Images from Ancient American Art:
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Front Face of a Stela (Free-standing stone with relief),
Maya, Late Classic period, 692 AD, Guatemala, 1967.29
©The Cleveland Museum of Art



God with Maize and Flowers, Central Mexico, Aztec, 13-16th c.,
1949.555
©The Cleveland Museum of Art